

Steers and Burros

Matthew 5:5

Ephesians 4:1-2

October 6, 2024

Suppose a Fortune 500 company was looking for a new CEO and decided to write a description of the ideal person to be its new CEO. **Do you think meekness would be on the list?** Assertive, self-assured, possibly decisive, would be on that list but probably not meekness.

How about a pro football team looking for a new head coach, do you think gentleness and meekness are at the top of the job description? No one would call Dan Campbell gentle and meek. Do you remember what he said at his first press conference as the Lions head coach, "We're **gonna kick you in the teeth, and when you punch us back** we're gonna smile at you, and when you knock us down we're going to get up, and on the way, we're going to bite a kneecap off." There is nothing meek in that statement.

Even pastor search committees are not looking for someone who is gentle and meek. I have never seen that in a church profile or job description. We don't want a meek person to be our leader. We want someone who is dynamic, powerful.

So Jesus' third beatitude, "**Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth,**" comes as something of a surprise. What's so great about being meek? Part of our problem is due to a misunderstanding—we hear the word "meek" and automatically think "weak." **The stereotype of meekness is a person who has no will of their own.** We think of a meek person as someone passive who cannot help letting others take advantage of them. But we couldn't be more wrong. Jesus was not talking about the shy, timid, mousy person who is content to serve as the world's doormat. **Rather he was talking about people who are so committed to serving God** and serving other people that they have an astounding impact on our world.

Matthew 5:5

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Ephesians 4:1-2

"I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love."

May our hearts and minds be opened to a new understanding of God's presence and grace through the reading of these words.

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One way to define meekness is "strength under control." Meekness requires strength. Paul gives us an interesting snapshot of meekness in Ephesians 4:1-2 when he says, "*I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*" **To put it bluntly meekness means that you and I have to put up with each other.** It means that we will endure one another.

Out west and in other cultures that raise steer there is a practice for breaking an aggressive, bucking, uncontrollable steer. **The bucking steer is haltered to a little burro**, and the two are turned loose together onto the desert range. The scene is almost comedic, the giant steer and the little burro would be seen disappearing over the horizon, **the great steer tossing the poor burro about like a rag**

doll. They would sometimes be gone for days. But eventually they would return, **the little burro in the lead, trotting along for home with the submissive steer in tow.** Somewhere, out on that desert range, the steer would become exhausted from his strenuous attempts to rid himself of the burro; and at that point the burro would take control and become the leader. **The little meek and humble burro** through its quiet strength of determination and persistence conquered the mighty steer.

Whether it is at work, on a sports team, in our neighborhood, a civic organization, and even in church, sometimes the most spiritual thing we can do is to "put up" with one another. **We may chuckle as someone specifically came to your mind** when I said that but remember most likely you came to someone's mind when I said that as well. Let's be honest here, there are times when all of us are a bit hard to live with.

The strength to put up with another person is born out of love and a genuine concern for the other person. There is the recognition that everyone one has quirks and flaws that can be annoying and difficult to tolerate, but even so, **they are a person who deserves love, respect,** and acceptance. Folks this takes strength.

Meekness is an attribute of strength, but there is also the characteristic of humility involved as well. **The Ephesians passage mentions humbleness but what is humility?** Let's answer that by talking about the opposite of humility which is pride.

Have you ever been to a fair or carnival and gone into the fun house? **They have those crazy mirrors that distort our image,** perhaps a huge head a skinny body and enormous feet. Our image is completely out of proportion. **Pride will take some achievement or aspect of our character** and blow it out of proportion. Pride gives us a false view of ourselves. It inflates the few virtues we possess and makes us think we have others that we don't. **Pride blinds us, so that we fail to see the glaring faults** in ourselves that are so obvious to other people. It minimizes the few weaknesses we are willing to admit. **Worse yet, pride often convinces us to put on the false mask of humility** in an attempt to disguise what is really self-centeredness.

The late boxing great Muhammad Ali, was never known for being a humble person. Once he was on an airplane and was telling people, "I'm the greatest." The flight attendant looked at him and saw he didn't have his seatbelt fastened. **She said to him, "Mr. Ali, you'll have to fasten your seatbelt."** Ali responded, "Superman don't need no seatbelt." The attendant then replied, "Superman don't need no airplane either."

Here is our conundrum, if we are humble, do we know it? Is the proud person the one who says, "I'm a humble person"? When it comes to pride and humility, how do we know if we are living in a fun house of mirrors or not?

The place to start is to look for the pride in ourselves—and expect to find it. C. S. Lewis writes, "If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, **tell them the first step. The first step is to realize** that everyone is prideful. If you think you are not conceited, **it means you are very conceited indeed."** Pride is much easier to embrace and cultivate than humility. It only takes one or two compliments on something we did and pride can be in full bloom.

So the question is if a person is prideful where can they go to get humility, and how will they ever know if they have acquired it?

Humility in the simplest terms, involves turning the focus away from ourselves, and a turning toward God and others. It goes back to what we have heard so many times, “love God and love others.” It is when we find ourselves compelled to commit a significant portion of our lives, our time and energy to serve, **offer care and concern to the welfare and benefit** of meeting the needs of others; this is when humility and meekness has taken root in our lives.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. It is in the giving of ourselves willingly, investing ourselves in the wellbeing of others, in serving a cause bigger than ourselves that makes a difference in the world.

I continue to return to the idea of God’s upside-down kingdom that Jesus described as the first shall last and last shall be first, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, it is better to give than to receive. **In the economy of this upside-down kingdom meekness and humility has more impact**, value, and influence than power and pride. Remember the impact and influence that little burro had with that steer?

In a world of full steers may we burros.

Amen